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PREVENTING HEPATITIS SAVES LIVES, MONEY

HICKORY, N.C. – World Hepatitis Day is coming up July 28 and serves as a reminder for all of us to make sure that we are up to date on Hepatitis immunizations and that we are doing what we can to avoid exposure to the viral disease.

According to the World Hepatitis Alliance, 95 percent of people living with Hepatitis are not aware they have the virus, and less than 1 percent of people living with it receive treatment. The three most common types of Hepatitis virus are Hepatitis A, B and C. Here is a look at these three types and how you can protect yourself from contracting them.

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hepatitis A affects more than 3,500 people a year and happens after ingestion of microscopic amounts of fecal matter through close person-to-person contact or ingestion of contaminated food or drinks. Hepatitis A is of particular concern to Catawba County Public Health’s Environmental Health staff, who inspect restaurants and other foodservice facilities. Those inspections evaluate hand washing and other sanitation measures to help prevent an outbreak of Hepatitis A. Although it can cause fever, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, belly pain and other symptoms, no treatment is needed, as most people recover in a few months with no lasting liver damage.
- Hepatitis B infects nearly 20,000 new people a year and the CDC estimates that there are 1.2 million people living with chronic Hepatitis B infections. For some, the disease is temporary and resolves on its own; for others, the infection can lead to a chronic illness. About a quarter of those infected develop liver damage such as cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer. Hepatitis B can be transmitted through sexual contact or through infected mothers to their infants, and it is often seen in injection drug users and healthcare workers who are exposed to infected blood on the job. For most adults, the acute form of Hepatitis B will resolve on its own without treatment. For people who develop a chronic infection, there are injections and oral medications available to help slow down liver damage. A few people with chronic infections will need liver transplants if damage becomes severe.
- Hepatitis C infects around 30,000 new people a year and the CDC estimates that there are 3.2 million people living with a chronic Hepatitis C infection. It is most commonly transmitted through sharing of contaminated injection drug equipment, but can also be through sexual contact, birth by an infected mother, and through needle stick injuries among healthcare workers. Up to 85 percent of infected people develop chronic infections, with permanent liver damage present in two out of three people and cirrhosis in one in five people.

You can protect yourself from contracting Hepatitis A and B through vaccinations, which are available by making an appointment with your healthcare provider or at Catawba County Public Health by calling (828) 695-5800. However, there is no vaccine for Hepatitis C, and treatment typically ranges from \$80,000 to \$100,000, according to Hepatitis Central, an advocacy group. For more information on viral Hepatitis, visit the CDC at <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/>.

Catawba County Public Health promotes and protects the health of all Catawba County residents through preventive services, innovative partnerships, and community health improvement initiatives. For more information, please call (828) 695-5800 or visit www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth.

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“Leading the Way to a Healthier Community”

